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Heads of Panels on Iran-Contra Probe Are as Different in Style as House, Senate

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WASHINGTON—Sen. Daniel Inouye and Rep. Lee Hamilton, the newly appointed chairmen of the committees charged with investigating the Iran-Contra arms scandal, are as different in style as the Senate and House in which they have served for more than two decades.

After four terms in the Senate, Mr. Inouye, 62 years old, has a strong power base in the Appropriations and Commerce Committees. But the Hawaii Democrat's great strength is as a master of the institution's cloakroom politics.

Mr. Hamilton, 55, who was elected to the House in 1964, is more standoffish. A tall, scholarly Indiana attorney, his rise to power is less the result of who he knows than what he knows from his years immersed in the Foreign Affairs and Intelligence Committees.

Their common asset is their credibility among colleagues. In picking chairmen, Senate and House Democratic leaders chose moderates who can't be easily dismissed as biased by the Reagan administration. Severely wounded in World War II while serving in all-Nisei Japanese-American battalion, Mr. Inouye fits the mold of an ethnic patriot. Mr. Hamilton, with his graying crew cut and flat-toned voice, is a minister's son from a Midwest river port city.

Although instinctively measured in their politics, both men have taken on some of the character of the houses in which they serve. More than the Senate, the House has been the battleground for the administration's Central America policy. Mr. Hamilton's experience as chairman of the Intelligence Committee has forced him into the sort of confrontational role he often avoided in years past.

Both men have opposed military aid to the Nicaraguan insurgents, but Sen. Inouye was slower to take this position than Rep. Hamilton and has since helped to facilitate funding for nonlethal assistance. In his comments yesterday, the Hawaii Democrat was cautious in defining the scope of the investigation before him, and he has been given a committee with a moderate to conservative tilt.

Mr. Hamilton's assignment could prove more fractious. His eight fellow Democrats on the House committee announced yesterday include six former or current committee chairmen and the new Democratic majority leader, Rep. Thomas Foley of Wash-

ington. Rep. Ed Jenkins, a savvy Georgian, is the only Democrat on the committee who has never been a committee chairman. The six Republicans include such young, aggressive conservatives as Reps. Jim Courter of New Jersey and Ohio's Michael DeWine.

"We have no prima donnas in the Congress," said Mr. Hamilton, laughing. "We will work in a cordial and cooperative way."

Mr. Inouye's experience in foreign policy comes from his early tenure as Senate Intelligence Committee chairman in the mid-1970s. But his more important platform has been as the top Democrat on the Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the Appropriations panel. It is a deal-making world where he has championed Israel and the maritime industry at home and played an influential role in disputes over military aid to El Salvador and more recently the Philippines. In 1983, his outspoken criticism of the administration's El Salvador policy posed a crisis for the State Department, but he never drifted so far that he couldn't be part of the final aid package, which he signed "with reservations."

Mr. Inouye has long been touted as potential successor to Senate Democratic Leader Robert Byrd of West Virginia. Last spring and summer the Hawaii senator considered making a run for the post, but decided against challenging Mr. Byrd. The new chairmanship ensures him a platform if he should run in another two years. But Mr. Byrd was careful to name a potential rival to Mr. Inouye, Maine's Sen. George Mitchell, to the same panel.

Mr. Hamilton's ambitions lie more in the permanent committee structure so fundamental to the House. His tenure on the Intelligence Committee is complemented by his ranking position on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, where he heads the Mideast Subcommittee, which oversees U.S.-Iran relations. He was critical of reported Israeli arms shipments to Iran long before the current controversy broke, and he has been willing in the past to take positions opposed by Jewish voters and members aligned with the pro-Israel lobby.

Mr. Hamilton's knowledge and credibility made him a trusted adviser to House Speaker Thomas O'Neill during the Lebanon crisis of 1983. The Indianan has always seemed more distant than the cigar-smoking Mr. O'Neill. He shrinks from the suggestion that he might have had a mentor or patron in his early years in Congress, and critics say his knowledge can foster a certain arrogance and insularity.

Mr. Hamilton's differences and similarities with Mr. Inouye are well illustrated by the roles they played in another scandal—the Abscam political-corruption cases of the early 1980s. Mr. Inouye defended then-Sen. Harrison Williams and was able to help facilitate the New Jersey Democrat's resignation and save the Senate from having to vote on expulsion. Mr. Hamilton condemned the conduct of Pennsylvania Rep. Michael (Ozzie) Myers, convicted of bribery. But in a dramatic speech, the Indianan bucked the majority of the House by arguing, unsuccessfully, that the chamber was rushing a vote on expulsion for the sake of the coming 1980 elections.